

BOOKS IN REVIEW

The Problem of Limited War*

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SOME unsung genius in the Pacific theater during the Second World War wrote a piece of advice for Americans in troubled times which ran: "*When in danger,/when in doubt,/Run in circles!/Scream and shout!*"

As one listened, in the first days after the launching of the Sputniks, to the bellows of Congressional consternation, the muddled and contradictory mouthings of White House aides and Pentagon bureaucrats, and the inevitable frantic attempts of party politicians to find scapegoats among their opponents, that bit of doggerel seemed all too appropriate. Unfortunately, it wasn't funny any longer.

There are some indications, thank heaven, that we have been so thoroughly alarmed by the Russian achievement that our efforts will not be entirely confined to circular motions and loud noises. It is reassuring to note, for instance, that, on the scientific front at least, some positive action has been taken; and it is reasonable to suppose that much more will be done in the near future to reduce what is now admitted to be a frightening Russian superiority in rocket development. What is less evident, at this moment of massive reappraisal, is an equal determination to do something about another dangerous weakness in our military posture, one which existed before the Sputniks and which, if the shock caused by them induces us to pour *all* our energies into rocket development, will become even more serious. This weakness arises from the fact that we are gradually losing, if we have not already lost, our ability to fight any kind of war but a total,

all-out, thermonuclear one; and it is this weakness which in recent years has deprived our diplomacy of freedom of action and made our national strategy rigid and ineffective.

How did we come to this sorry pass? Both Henry Kissinger and Robert Osgood have concerned themselves with this problem, and they seem in general to agree that our initial mistake was to overestimate the political advantage of possessing the atomic bomb, and that, from this initial error, we gradually drifted into a dangerously exclusive dependence upon nuclear weapons. "We added the atomic bomb to our arsenal," Kissinger writes, "without integrating its implications into our thinking." We assumed that the possession of this terrible weapon would enable us to win any war that broke out, and we assumed further that general awareness of this would *prevent* any war from breaking out. Believing this, it was easy for us to persuade ourselves that there was no pressing need for conventional forces. National security would be protected by seeing to it that we got the biggest bang for every buck expended, and this meant spending our dollars on the atomic stockpile and on long-range aircraft, rather than on foot-soldiers—a commodity in which, we kept repeating, we could not hope to match the Soviet bloc anyway.

Even in the days when we possessed a monopoly of atomic weapons, this was a dangerous kind of thinking, for we never succeeded in fitting the bomb into our declared policy of repelling Communist aggression. Our possession of the bomb was certainly not successful in preventing the expansion of Soviet power in Central Europe. As Kissinger points out, Soviet propaganda alternately denied the effectiveness of atomic weapons and emphasized the moral iniquity of possessing, let alone using, them; and, while these tactics confused public

*A review of *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy*, by Henry A. Kissinger, Harper, for the Council on Foreign Relations, 455 pp., \$5.00; and *Limited War: The Challenge to American Strategy*, by Robert Endicott Osgood, University of Chicago Press, 307 pp., \$5.00.

opinion in the non-Soviet world and, in some cases, caused our friends to view us with fear and suspicion, the Soviets calmly went about increasing and solidifying their European empire without effective interference by us.

This should have cast some doubt upon the deterrent ability of atomic bombs, but it did not. Even after the first Russian atomic explosions marked the beginning of the Soviet Union's rapid progress toward parity with us, we went on talking as if our atomic might would solve all power problems. Even after the Korean war had demonstrated how little truth there was in this, the habit persisted; Mr. Dulles's speech about massive retaliation was not, for instance, made until January 1954. And even after the fall of Indo-China had shown that no one in the Soviet bloc was paying much attention to Mr. Dulles any more, administration spokesmen clung to their faith in nuclear threats. "If the Communist leadership," Secretary Quarles said in June 1956, "were faced with the plain fact that the United States stood ready to use its best weapons to defend its vital interests, they would have to conclude that [either limited or total] aggression would be unprofitable."

In view of the historical record since 1945, these were hollow words. The crucial problem of strategy, as Kissinger has written, "is the relationship between power and the willingness to use it, between the physical and psychological components of national policy. Faced with the knowledge of the consequences of a thermonuclear war, policy-makers will be reluctant to engage in a strategy, the penalty for which may well be social disintegration." If it was true, as Osgood writes, that "it was hard to avoid the conclusion in the fall of 1956 that the United States was progressively losing its capacity to fight anything but the smallest police action or the largest nuclear conflict," it was also true, and still is, that the possibility of our choosing the latter course was, and is, remote, except in the case of a direct attack upon our own territory or that of our closest allies. Forced, in the case of other kinds of aggression, to choose between acquiescence in a result we do not like or acceptance of the responsibility for unleashing thermonuclear destruction, we will almost certainly acquiesce, although we may try—as we have tried before—to hide the true nature of our defeat behind a smokescreen of elaborate explanations.

If we are to escape from this embarrassing

and dangerous position, we must—while maintaining atomic parity with the Russians—regain the capacity and the will to fight the kind of war we fought in Korea, although without the ambiguities that characterized that conflict. Both Osgood and Kissinger agree that we are going to have to be able and willing to fight limited wars—that is, wars which are fought for concrete, well-defined objectives, which do not involve the employment of what Secretary Quarles calls our "best weapons," and which are not intended to lead to the unconditional surrender of our opponent. The last point is very important, for, as Kissinger writes, "limited war is not a cheaper substitute for massive retaliation. . . . An attempt to reduce the enemy to impotence would remove the psychological balance which makes it profitable for both sides to keep the war limited." The ability to fight limited wars, in short, is not desirable as a means of satisfying an American craving for victory over Communism. It is meant rather to serve as another deterrent to Soviet aggression. It may not always work—that is, it may not always prevent the initiation or even the successful consummation of aggressive Soviet action—but it can be expected to increase the risks which the Soviets must calculate before they resort to even minor aggression, and, if it does nothing else, it will demonstrate that we no longer intend to rely solely on words to prevent brushfire wars or attacks upon the so-called "gray areas."

GRANTED the desirability of regaining the capacity to wage limited war, with what weapons shall we wage it? On this point, Kissinger plumps for limited *nuclear* war, arguing that, in any limited conflict between ourselves and the Soviet Union, we must use tactical nuclear weapons, because these weapons can be used effectively, without causing either excessive destruction or a gradual drift toward total war, and because we will be able to employ them more effectively than the Russians.

It is perhaps unwise to be quite as assured about these difficult questions as Kissinger is inclined to be. Take his statement that "a limited nuclear war would approach all-out war in destructiveness only if it should be conducted with the tactics of World War II, with fixed lines, massive attacks on communication centers and an attempt to wipe out the enemy industrial potential." Leaving aside the fact that World War II was not always conducted

on fixed lines, how much confidence can we place in this prediction? No one has ever used tactical atomic weapons in war, and there are therefore no real experts on the subject. If we think of actual areas in which we might have to conduct limited war, however, it is hard to see how great destruction could be avoided. In Central Europe, for example, there are many cities, and they are very close together. Even if we assume, with Kissinger, that the tactical units employed will be small, there will certainly be enough of them to necessitate reliance on communication centers for supplies; and, once the supply lines are subjected to nuclear attack (of the kind forecast in the "Carte Blanche" tactical air maneuvers of 1955), what becomes of all those cities—and of Kissinger's argument? Moreover, once you start to interdict supply and to attack air bases with small bombs, what is to prevent a gradual drift toward the use of bigger ones?

Osgood also envisages the possibility of using tactical atomic weapons in limited war, but he is much less confident than Kissinger and much more worried by the tough questions which will have to be answered before their employment can be decided upon. "Can a war with tactical atomic weapons be limited?" he asks. "Can tactical targets be distinguished from strategic targets? What would be the political repercussions of initiating the use of these weapons in Asia . . . [or] depending upon them for the defense of Europe? Will they meet the problem of indirect aggression? Will they necessarily give us a military advantage if the enemy employs them also?" (Kissinger believes they will, because of our superiority in "leadership . . . personal initiative and mechanical aptitude, qualities more prevalent in our society than in the regimented system of the USSR"—a statement that is no longer as persuasive as it might have been when it was written, before the launching of the Sputniks.)

"Will they even," Osgood continues, "necessarily permit us to economize in numbers of ground troops or in total defense expenditures? . . . The very posing of these questions assumes that we shall plan the use of tactical atomic weapons as a means of deterring and fighting limited wars, not as a means of escaping the problem; but here we must pause to wonder whether the United States has yet confronted the problem of limited war with sufficient candor and clarity of purpose to give

assurance that national strategy controls weapons rather than the other way around."

This is well said. One might add the point often made by James E. King, Jr., namely, that the difference between conventional and nuclear weapons is tolerably well understood, whereas the difference between tactical nuclear weapons and other nuclear weapons is not so clear. Until we are sure of the answers to Osgood's questions, we should not be too anxious to commit ourselves to the concept of limited nuclear war.

If we do not, therefore, follow Kissinger all the way, we can nevertheless follow him in his brilliant exposition of the necessity of finding a strategic doctrine which will restore flexibility to our national policy. No one who reads this book will experience much difficulty in agreeing with his statement that "limited war and the diplomacy appropriate to it provide a means to escape from the sterility of the quest for absolute peace which paralyzes by the vagueness of its hopes, and of the search for absolute victory which paralyzes by the vastness of its consequences." But what about the great American public which does not read books?

THE possibility of our regaining the capacity to fight limited wars will depend, both Kissinger and Osgood agree, upon a public opinion that has been educated to the realities of the nuclear age. Neither author is exactly optimistic about the speedy success of such education. This nation has always had an ambivalent attitude toward war. Osgood speaks of a "confluence of pacifism and pugnacity" which makes Americans wish to avoid war as long as possible but, when it is forced upon them, to win it decisively. Kissinger writes of our impetuosity, of our constant craving for certainty and final solutions, and of our lack of tragic experience, which robs us of the kind of perspective needed in these dangerous days. That these are characteristic American traits is true, and it is also true that they make it difficult for Americans to understand the problems of an age in which total military victory is unthinkable, permanent solutions to our ideological conflicts unlikely, and the possibility of national tragedy very real. These qualities and others—the disinclination to think about unpleasant things, the preoccupation with material values, a tendency toward the kind of vulgar ostentation that consumes national resources in order to adorn our private

automobiles with useless appendages, and what appears to be a growing moral flabbiness—will not be easy to overcome, but they must be overcome if our national strategy is to regain its effectiveness.

White Rose, Black Hangman

CONSCIENCE IN REVOLT. Sixty-Four Stories of Resistance in Germany 1933-45. By ANNEDORE LEBER. Associated Booksellers. 270 pp. \$4.50.

Reviewed by GERALD REITLINGER

THIS is an important book in spite of its thoroughly unliterary appearance—it is printed throughout on glossy paper in order to accommodate a collection of portrait-photographs. Published in Germany in 1954 under the title *Das Gewissen Steht Auf*, the book's considerable success led to its appearance in England, and now to this American edition.

The sixty-four sketches included are pious obituaries rather than objective biographies, yet they contain a good deal of original research, and in the case of some of the more humble figures it must have meant considerable labor to dig up any biographical data. That the book's prevailing tone should be solemn is only natural: the author is the widow of a leading member of the July 1944 conspiracy circle. The facts have nevertheless been checked with true German thoroughness, and there is appended a valuable bibliography of writings concerning the German "Resistance movement."

The work has its faults. The biographies are not arranged alphabetically, but grouped under the quite capricious headings of "Youth," "Learning," "Friendship," "The Stage and the Law," "Tradition," "Christianity," and "Freedom and Order." It is difficult to see any merit in such an arrangement, which is tiresome as well as incomprehensible. Even harder to comprehend is the criterion of selection. It is of course general knowledge that there were many times this number of victims executed for anti-Nazi activities. Frau Leber only seeks, she says in her preface, to "convey in the stories of the life and death of sixty-four people the motives and manner of resistance." But that, it seems to me, is just what the selection does not convey. Half the biographies concern

members of the conspiracy circle of 1944, known as the July plotters. The others deal with persons who had no connection with the conspiracy but who suffered martyrdom in the course of the twelve years of Hitler's rule. Their inclusion is intended to show the universality of the German resistance to Hitler. "Resentment and rebellion brought together people of every kind and drove them to action, and in the end their outraged consciences found a common outlet on 20 July 1944." But if one is to believe that the July plot—that ill-conceived conspiracy of despairing generals, staff officers, and politicians *en retraite*—was really the final outlet of all this emotion, then truly universality must have been lacking in the German sentiment of resistance.

ONE should not, however, judge the thirty-two martyred victims who were not involved in the July plot by the unfortunate sentence quoted above. Only a few of them were in fact active resisters. Some were merely victims of their own indiscretion. Seven of them were executed for defeatist talk, among them a boy of seventeen who repeated items of news from British broadcasts. A company commander on the Russian front and a museum curator in Berlin were each killed for a single ill-humored remark that was overheard and reported. These were victims of hideous cruelty and tyranny, but surely they were not resisters. In nine other instances there was not even the opportunity to resist. Either the subjects were murdered during the anarchic days of 1933, or arrested and done to death later on in concentration camps because at the time of Hitler's accession to power they had belonged to proscribed Christian or left-wing organizations—again passive martyrs.

Some were the victims of accident: an actor committed suicide because he could not bear to part from his Jewish wife; a nun in a Dutch convent perished at Auschwitz because she had revealed her Jewish origin. The head of the Berlin fire brigade was murdered in prison for having disclosed too much about the origins of the Reichstag fire. There are, however, pointers in this book to two actual conspiracies, apart from the July plot: the "White Rose" conspiracy of the Munich University students and the Communist "Rote Kapelle."

The "White Rose" appears in Frau Leber's biographies of Professor Kurt Huber and his twenty-one-year-old pupil Sophie Scholl, an